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A History of Russian Kurdology: With a Brief Literature Overview

Khanna Omarkhali and Nodar Mossaki

Obwohl bereits Aspekte der russischen Kurdologie in einigen Artikeln behandelt wurden, war dies nie Gegenstand einer genaueren Forschung. Die Geschichte der russischen Kurdologie kann in drei Perioden eingeteilt werden: in die zaristische, die sowjetische und post-sowjetische Periode. Nachdem sich die russische Kurdologie bereits in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts formieren konnte, spielte sie lange Zeit weltweit eine führende Rolle. In der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts entwickelten sich die Kurdischen Studien als ein eigener Zweig innerhalb der Orientalistik im Russischen Reich. Das Goldene Zeitalter dieser Disziplin war in den frühen 1980er Jahren, als Kurdische Studien in den drei wichtige Zentren der Sowjetischen Orientalischen Studien an den Akademien der Wissenschaften in Leningrad, Moskau und Yerevan institutionalisiert wurden. Obwohl auch heute die Kurdischen Studien eine immer noch aktive Plattform in Russland bilden, ist die Disziplin mit einem großen Problem konfrontiert, nämlich dem Mangel an ausgebildetem wissenschaftlichem Personal. In diesem Beitrag wird ein kurzer Überblick über die Geschichte der Kurdischen Studien mit einem Fokus auf die sowjetische und post-sowjetische Periode gegeben und es wird dabei auf die russischsprachigen Publikationen genauer eingegangen. Das erste Kapitel bietet einen Überblick über die Geschichte der Kurdischen Studien in Russland, im zweiten Kapitel wird auf die Entwicklungen nach der Revolution und während der Sowjetzeit eingegangen und schließlich wird im letzten Kapitel die post-sowjetische Zeit und die gegenwärtige Situation der Kurdischen Studien in Russland behandelt.

Despite a few published articles on some aspects of Russian Kurdology, it has never been the subject of any in-depth research. The

history of Russian Kurdology may be divided into three distinct periods: tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet. After Russian Kurdology developed in the first half of the 19th century, it held a leading position in the world for a long time. As a separate branch of Oriental Studies, Kurdish Studies started to take shape in the Russian Empire around the mid-19th century. The discipline experienced its golden age in the early 1980s, when Kurdish Studies were established at three major centers for Soviet Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences: Leningrad, Moscow, and Yerevan. Although today's Kurdish Studies is still an active academic platform in Russia, the field is confronted with a big problem, namely the lack of trained scientific personnel. This paper presents a brief overview of the history of Russian Kurdology, particularly in the Soviet and post-Soviet period, and focuses on Russian Kurdish Studies literature. The first of this paper's three chapters provides an overview of the history of Kurdish Studies in tsarist Russia. The second part presents its development after the revolution and during the Soviet period, while the last covers the post-Soviet period and the current situation of Kurdish Studies in Russia.

Introduction

After Russian Kurdology (*kurdovédenie*) developed in the first half of the 19th century, it held a leading position in the world for a long time. In the early 20th century, the scope of Iranian Studies began to broaden significantly, leading to the formation of separate branches. Today Russia is considered to be the cradle of Kurdish Studies, where it developed as an independent interdisciplinary field. In terms of Kurdish Studies, the USSR ranked first in the world; no other country had a team of specialists as large and qualified.

Despite a few published articles on some aspects of Russian Kurdology, however, it has never been the subject of any in-depth research. A few works dedicated to certain aspects of Russian

Kurdology were published in the European languages though.¹ The article by Alexandre Benningsen is certainly worth mentioning because it includes the most extensive list of works on Kurdish Studies up to 1960. As it was published half a century ago, it does not cover an extensive corpus of literature on Kurdish Studies appearing in the USSR and post-Soviet Russia. In recent years, some works on Soviet Kurdology have appeared.² Nevertheless, some of them contain factual inaccuracies due to a lack of reliable information. Moreover, there are no reviews on Kurdish Studies literature published during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. It seems that this negative development is based on two influencing reasons: first, Western researchers do not have access to new materials appearing in Russia; and second, the rather marginal status of the Russian language in scholarship worldwide. The fact that Soviet and Russian Kurdologists have never actually begun informing Western scholars about their research certainly did not help either.

This paper presents a brief overview of the history of Russian Kurdology, particularly in the Soviet and post-Soviet period, and focuses on Russian Kurdish Studies literature. We will not extensively address certain issues discussed in other articles to avoid redundancy. Similarly, this paper directs less attention to Kurdish Studies in tsarist Russia because this period is generally rather well-known in the West due to numerous works in European languages that were published in Russia at that time. In addition, the tsarist period has also been sufficiently analyzed by Soviet Kurdologists. The first of this paper's three chapters provides an overview of the history of Kurdish Studies in tsarist Russia. The second part presents its development after the revolution and during the Soviet period, while

¹ See e.g. Benningsen 1960: 513–530; Bois 1960a: 10–14; Bois 1960b: 152–160; Mokri 1963: 71–105; Landau 1975: 195–198; Blau 1986: 249–256.

² See e.g. Leezenberg 2011: 86–102.

the last covers the post-Soviet period and the current situation of Kurdish Studies in Russia.

1. Kurdish Studies in Russia before 1917

As a separate branch of Oriental Studies, Kurdish Studies started to take shape in the Russian Empire around the mid-19th century, when a number of publications on Kurds appeared in Russian literature. The following, amongst other, were of greater importance in the development of Kurdish Studies in Russia: Johannes Albrecht Bernhard Dorn (1805–1881) known in Russian as Boris Andreevič Dorn, François-Bernard Charmoy (1793–1869, in Russian: Franc Francevič), William Dittel, Il'ja Nikolaevič Berezin (1818–1896), Valentin Alekseevič Žukovsky (1858–1918), Vladimir Vladimirovič Vel'jaminov-Zernov (1830–1904), Karl Germanovič Zaleman (1850–1916), Alexandr Žaba (1801–1894), Peter Lerch (1827–1884), Vladimir Fëdorovič Minorsky (1877–1966), and Basil Nikitin (1885–1960).

After Russia started expanding to the Middle East, the county became more interested in the Kurds as they came into contact with each other. In consequence, various manuscripts on the Kurds appeared in Russian collections. Not only scholars but also countless diplomats, soldiers and travelers were involved in the early development of Russian Kurdology.

In the early 19th century, a manuscript by Sharaf khān Bidlīsī entitled “Sharaf-nāma”³ appeared in the Imperial Academy of Sciences and played a major role in the development of academic interest in the history of the Kurds. Orientalists in Russia (e.g. Michail Gavrilovič Volkov, Christian Martin Joachim Frähn⁴, Dorn) studied the

³ Bidlīsī 1868–1875.

⁴ Russian: Christian Danilovič Frähn (1782–1851).

manuscript for several decades. Between 1860 and 1862, the same manuscript was published in Persian by Vel'jaminov-Zernov.⁵ Within three years, he had prepared and published the text of "Sharaf-nāma" based on four manuscripts kept in collections at St. Petersburg.⁶

Charmoy, a student of Silvestre de Sacy, found the manuscript by Sharaf khān Bidlīsī in the collection of the Asiatic Museum of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg in the 1830s. He began translating it into French and added comments on the resettlement of the Kurds as well as their history and ethnography.⁷ In 1835, however, he had to leave St. Petersburg and returned to France, where he continued his work on the Persian text of the manuscript. After he had completed his project in 1864, he turned to the Imperial Academy of Sciences as a foreign corresponding member with a proposal on the publication of his work. Soon he sent the manuscript to St. Petersburg via diplomatic post.⁸ The Imperial Court showed interest in the manuscript and on 28 June 1868, the Russian emperor issued a decree to place the publication "in the library of His Imperial Majesty" with "the highest pleasure" of "acceptance of a gift". The decree stated that the work of Charmoy was "important in relation to explaining the history of the Kurds, the tribe which is still very little known to Orientalists, and shows erudition and scientific knowledge of the author".⁹ Only the first part of Volume I (1868) was published in Charmoy's lifetime; the other parts of "Sharaf-nāma" did not appear until 1875.¹⁰ After Charmoy's

⁵ Vel'jaminov-Zernov 1860.

⁶ For more information see Vasil'eva 1999: 27.

⁷ Kulikova 2001: 64; Kurdoev 1972: 386–387. It should be pointed out that Charmoy, who is considered to be the founder of Iranian Studies at St. Petersburg University lived in Russia for only 18 years from 1817 to 1835 (Kulikova 2001: 58–67).

⁸ Kulikova 2001: 64.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ This and following volumes: *Chèref-Nâme* 1868–1875.

death in 1868, the Imperial Academy of Sciences asked its academicians Marie-Félicité Brosset (1802–1880), Dorn and Vel'jaminov-Zernov to find a solution to this dilemma. On 14 October 1869, the Academy's commission proposed asking Joseph Fëdorovič Gotvald (1813–1897), professor of Orientalism at Kazan Imperial University, to “supervise printing the final parts of Charmoy's work”.¹¹

From the 1840s to the beginning of the 20th century, valuable materials on the Kurds and Kurdistan were reflected in travel notes and military reports, which represent a rich source of factual material on both the Kurds and Kurdistan.¹² Interesting materials were published in Russian periodicals as well.

In general, however, the Kurds were studied in the context of wider fields at that time – Oriental, and in particular Iranian Studies, and military geography.

Nikolaj Jakovlevič Marr (Georgian: Nikoloz Iak'obis dze Mari, 1864–1934), Joseph Abgarovič Orbeli (1887–1961), Minorsky and Nikitin connected the study of the Kurds in the tsarist period with the time after the Russian revolution in 1917. Minorsky and Nikitin, however, left Russia and continued their work in Europe where their activities are well known.

2. Kurdish Studies after the Revolution and in the USSR (1917–1991)

Marr, Orbeli and Aleksandr Arnol'dovič Frejman¹³ (1879–1968) played a special role in the formation of the Soviet Kurdish Studies school in

¹¹ Vasil'eva 1999: 29; Kulikova 2001: 64–65.

¹² Cf. amongst other especially the works of Koljubakin 1888; Aver'janov 1900; Aver'janov 1912.

¹³ On 28 May 2014, the seminar “Frejmanovskie čtenija” was held at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences (previously the Institute of

Leningrad, which later became the largest center for Kurdish Studies in the world.

Orbeli started to work as an expert on Armenian and Caucasian Studies and became engaged in the field of Kurdish Studies after his trip to Moks from 1911 to 1913, which was organized by the Academy of Sciences and supported by Marr.¹⁴ In Moks, he had recorded Kurdish texts which he later used to create a Kurdish-Russian dictionary published in Yerevan as late as 2002.¹⁵ The publication of the dictionary on the Moks variant of Kurmanji was prepared by Žakelina Surenovna Musaéljan (b. 1933) and Isaak Iosifovič Cukerman (1909–1998).

The Institute of Language and Thinking (*Institút jazýka i myšlénija*), one of the major scientific institutions of the USSR in the late 1920s–1930s, carried out major research for Kurdish Studies. In late 1932, Vil'čevskij graduated from the institute and was appointed a research fellow for “Kurdish languages in the Parso-Indian cabinet” thanks to Marr’s¹⁶ support. In consequence, Vil'čevskij started to collect material for a dictionary on the Sulaimaniyah variant of Kurdish.¹⁷

In 1933, on the instruction of the All-Union Central Committee for the New Alphabet (*Vsesojúznyj Centrál'nyj Komitéť Nóvogo Alfavíta*), Vil'čevskij conducted trips to Central Asia and Transcaucasia to work on a unified literary Kurdish language. Vil'čevskij regularly issued reports at the Institute of Language and Thinking, one of which (on Kurdish grammar) was produced in collaboration with Kanat

Oriental Studies). One of the reports by Zara Alievna Jusupova was dedicated to Frejman and Kurdish Studies.

¹⁴ See, e.g.: Orbeli 1982.

¹⁵ Orbeli 2002.

¹⁶ On Marr and Kurdish Studies see Vil'čevskij 1937: 209–233.

¹⁷ *Acta Linguistica Petropolitana* 2013: 356.

Kalaševič Kurdoev (Kurdish: Qanatê Kurdo, d. 1985). Some of the aforementioned reports were published as articles or formed part of his dissertation dedicated to Yezidi texts and defended in 1938.¹⁸ Marr supervised Arab Šamilov (Kurdish: Erebê Šemo, 1897–1979) when he was a doctoral (PhD) candidate at the State Academy of the History of Material Culture (*Gosudárstvennaja akadémija istórii materiál'noj kul'túry*, GAIMK).¹⁹ At this time, Šamilov published the article “On the feudalism of the Kurds”²⁰ in a GAIMK journal that was edited by Marr.

The development of Kurdish Studies was also heavily influenced by the so-called policy of *kul'tstroitel'stvo*. A group of ethnic Kurds, amongst other, was sent to the so-called workers' faculty (*rabóčij fakul'tét*) at the A.S. Enukidze Leningrad Oriental Institute (*Leningrádskij vostóčnyj institút imeni A.S. Enukidze*) which prepared Soviet workers to enroll at academic institutions. After graduation, several Kurds were sent to study at the Leningrad Institute of History, Philosophy and Linguistics²¹ which trained linguists in Kurdish Studies on Frejman's initiative. His students Kurdoev and Cukerman worked with Šamilov to publish two articles in Kurdish dedicated to the problems of gender and *izafeh* in 1933.²²

A Kurdish writing system was developed based on Latin and initiated the debate on a unified literary Kurdish language, which, of course, required the further development of Kurdish Studies. In the 1930s, several papers on the Kurdish language were published, most of which by Vil'čevskij and Cukerman. Moreover, Boris Vsevolodovič

¹⁸ *Acta Linguistica Petropolitana* 2013: 329, 357, 377.

¹⁹ Šamilov, however, did not complete his doctoral dissertation.

²⁰ Šamilov 1934: 111–134.

²¹ The Leningrad Institute of History, Philosophy and Linguistics was separated from the Leningrad University in 1930, and rejoined it seven years later in 1937.

²² For more information see Kurdoev 1972: 390–391.

Miller and Lev Aleksandrovič Chetagurov published articles on Iranian languages, in which they analyzed various aspects of the Kurdish language. Between 1939 and 1940, three graduates of the Leningrad Institute of History, Philosophy and Linguistics – Julija Jul'evna Avaliani²³ (1907–1984), Cukerman and Kurdoev – defended their doctoral dissertations on Kurdish language and continued their scientific work at various academic institutions. Cukerman received his doctoral degree in Kurdish linguistics in 1939 and went on to publish several monographs on the Kurdish language.²⁴ He also wrote articles in Kurdish and Armenian using the pseudonym *Iskoyê Ūsib*.

In the field of Kurdish Studies, considerable work was carried out in Armenia. In fact, Armenia became the center for various research projects in the field of folklore and practical linguistics. Armenian Kurdish Studies focused on collecting a wide range of materials, books published in Kurdish, and textbooks.

However, Kurdish Studies was not limited to philological works in the 1930s. A scientific research fellow of the Institute of Oriental Studies, USSR Academy of Sciences, Fëdor Borisovič Rostopčín,²⁵ developed the world's first bibliography on Kurdish Studies. He used literature that was available at the Leningrad and Moscow libraries including the titles of 732 monographs, articles etc., predominantly in Russian and western European languages.²⁶

In the 1920s, and even more so in the 1930s, articles on issues related to Kurdish Studies were occasionally published in academic journals of Oriental and African Studies as well as other specialized

²³ In 1940, she defended her doctoral dissertation “Pronouns in the Kurdish language” (*Mestoimenija v kurdskom jazyke*).

²⁴ E.g. Cukerman 1986.

²⁵ Rostopčín 1933: 294–326.

²⁶ *Ibid.*: 292.

magazines. Aside from various aspects of the Kurdish liberation movement and the Kurdish issue in international relations, most of the articles discussed socio-economic problems, most noteworthy of which are the works of Turkologists K. Vasilevskij²⁷ and Aron Davydovič Novičev²⁸ as well Vil'čevskij²⁹ and Šamilov³⁰. The first in this series was the work of a famous poet and political activist, Abolqāsem Lahūti³¹ (1887–1957), which was followed by a series of articles in the early 1930s.³²

A lot of the scientific work applied Marxist-Leninist ideas on the study of the Kurds³³ as well as propaganda to analyze the international situation. In the USSR, a new stage in the development of Kurdish Studies began after World War II. In addition, the country's rebuilding and the development of academic disciplines, including Oriental Studies, also affected Kurdish Studies.

2.1. Kurdish Studies in St. Petersburg

In St. Petersburg, active studies of Kurdish began in the 1930s. Here St. Petersburg University trained specialists in Kurdish Studies with the assistance of Frejman as well as one of the founders of modern Kurdish Studies in St. Petersburg, Orbeli. In 1959 and under his leadership, the Group of Kurdish Studies was founded at the Leningrad branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies as an independent unit. Previously in 1951, the Institute of Oriental Studies was moved from Leningrad to Moscow because Soviet policy was implemented in the East and intensified the need to study a wider

²⁷ V-ij [Vasilevskij] 1932.

²⁸ Novičev 1934: 54–64.

²⁹ Vil'čevskij 1936.

³⁰ Šamilov 1934: 111–134.

³¹ Lachuti 1923.

³² Kurd Oglu 1932; Vasil'ev 1931: 98–114.

³³ Lazarev 1968: 161.

range of related questions, i.e. recent history, politics, international relations, ethnic problems, and the economy. Manuscripts were traditionally studied at the Leningrad Institute of Oriental Studies, leading to the development of such directions as philological and partly medieval history. When the Institute of Oriental Studies, the USSR Academy of Science (*Institút vostokóvedenija akadémii náúk SSSR*), was transferred from Leningrad to Moscow, Leningrad's Oriental Studies changed significantly because only a small collection of Oriental manuscripts remained, primarily in form of an archive. In 1956, however, the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Science decided to transfer the sector to the Leningrad branch. Orbeli was appointed to head the branch but also retained his function as dean of studies at the Faculty of Oriental Studies.³⁴ Within a few years, the number of staff members rapidly increased at the Leningrad branch and dozens of young graduates from the Faculty of Oriental Studies were employed.

In 1959, Orbeli decided to separate a group of Kurdologists from the Iranian cabinet to form in an own structural unit within its leadership. The group included Kurdoev, Cukerman, and Margarita Séda Borisovna Rudenko³⁵ (1926–1976), the young Iranists Musaéljan, Evgenija Il'jinična Dement'eva (later Vasil'eva, b. 1935) as well as the doctoral candidates Iraida Anatol'evna Smirnova (1928–2010), Zara Alievna Jusupova (b. 1934), Kerim Rahmanovič Ejjubi³⁶ (1924–1995) and Ordychan Džalilovič Džalilov (1932–2007)³⁷. In fact, this group of

³⁴ Petrosjan 2002: 7–12; Kyčanov 2002: 13–22.

³⁵ She defended her thesis on Ahmed Khani in 1954.

³⁶ He was born in Mahabad, came to the USSR in 1946, and lived in Baku until 1956. From 1956 on, he lived in Leningrad.

³⁷ Kurdoev 1972: 392.

Leningrad Kurdologists³⁸ worked practically without any new staff members for almost over half a century.

The center conducted major research on critical Kurdish linguistic descriptions of manuscripts, literature, various issues of medieval history, and folklore. An important contribution to the development of Soviet Kurdish Studies was made by Kurdoev who headed the group of Kurdish Studies from 1960 to his death in 1985. He was born into a Kurdish Yezidi family of the Susiz village in the Dîgor region near Kars, Turkey in 1909. Kurdoev passed away in Leningrad on 31 October 1985. Qanatê Kurdo was sent to St. Petersburg to continue his studies on recommendation of the Communist Party of Armenia in 1928. After receiving his PhD in 1939, he worked as a senior research fellow at the Institute of Ethnography until 1941. From 1943 to 1945, he took part in the war before returning to his scientific work. Kurdoev started teaching Kurdology at the Department of Oriental Studies, and at the Faculty of Oriental Studies in Leningrad from 1960. He published his famous academic Kurdish language grammar,³⁹ Kurdish (Kurmanji)-Russian dictionary,⁴⁰ Kurdish (Sorani)-Russian dictionary,⁴¹ numerous other works in the field of linguistics,⁴² a history of the Kurds, Kurdish literature,⁴³ and instruction books in Kurdish.

Cukerman greatly contributed to the field of linguistics through his research on various aspects of grammar in the Kurdish language, including Khorasanian Kurmanji.⁴⁴ He was born in Minsk, studied

³⁸ Without Rudenko (d. 1977), Kurdoev (d. 1985), O. Džalilov (d. 2007), Ejjubi (d. 1995) and Smirnova (d. 2010).

³⁹ Kurdoev 1957.

⁴⁰ Kurdoev 1960.

⁴¹ Kurdoev 1983.

⁴² Kurdoev 1973.

⁴³ Kurdo 1983–1985.

⁴⁴ Cukerman 1986.

under the famous scholars Orbeli and Marr, and learned Kurdish from Erebe Shemo. In 1939, he defended his doctoral dissertation on Kurdish linguistics before volunteering to fight in World War II. In 1957, Cukerman's former teacher Orbeli invited him to return to Leningrad and continue his work in Kurdish Studies. In 1965, he defended his habilitation (*dóktorskaja dissertacija*) and published two monographs on the Kurdish language. He remained a research fellow at the institute until 1978.

The linguist Smirnova and her husband Ejjubi⁴⁵ worked at the Leningrad Institute of Linguistics, USSR Academy of Sciences (later the Institute of Linguistic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences) and co-authored books on different Kurdish dialects, including Mukri, Zaza and Synei.⁴⁶ They also published the rare historical-dialectological grammar of the Kurdish language.⁴⁷

One of Kurdoev's PhD students, Jusupova, has been working at the Institute of Oriental Studies in St. Petersburg from 1961 to the present. She is the author of more than 70 scientific works on Kurdish.

This Kurdish Studies academia has done great work in the field of studying literary manuscripts, one of the strengths of St. Petersburg Kurdology. Their success was promoted by two favorable circumstances: first, the existence of a rich manuscript collection both at the Saltykov-Ščedrin State Public Library (*Gosudárstvennaja públíčnaja bibliotéka ímeni M.E. Saltykóva-Ščedrina*, now – Russian National Library) and at the Leningrad Institute of Oriental Studies; and second, a high level of studies on oriental manuscripts in the USSR.

⁴⁵ Ejjubi defended his PhD thesis on the works of Hazhar in 1961 .

⁴⁶ Smirnova / Ejjubi 2001.

⁴⁷ Smirnova / Ejjubi 1999.

In the 1950s, a scientific series *Pámjatniki pís'mennosti Vostóka*⁴⁸ (Monuments of the Oriental Literature) was created. A great contribution to Kurdish literature studies was made by Rudenko⁴⁹ who is considered a pioneer in the research of medieval Kurdish literature and the founder of the literary criticism approach in Kurdish Studies. She published the first catalog of Kurdish manuscripts in the Saltykov-Ščedrin State Public Library. Moreover, she translated a number of the medieval works of Kurdish poets, such as Faqi-yē Tayrān, Aḥmadē Ḥānī⁵⁰, Salīmē Silēmān, and Harīsē Bitlīsī.

Rudenko's PhD student Musaéljan worked at the Institute of Oriental Studies in Leningrad (from 2007 renamed to the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts which is officially the St. Petersburg branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies) from 1958 to 2013. In 1963, Musaéljan published her well-known bibliography on Kurdish Studies in two volumes.⁵¹

Vasil'eva is the only historian from the group of St. Petersburg-based Kurdologists who still works in the Kurdish Cabinet. She has translated and annotated a number of the Kurdish historical chronicles from the Middle Ages, including the translation of the fundamentally important work on Kurdish history "Šaraf-nāma" by Šaraf Ḥān Bidlīsī. In the series *Written Monuments of the Orient*, she published a Russian translation with an extensive preface and annotation to "Šaraf-nāma".⁵²

⁴⁸ *Pámjatniki pís'mennosti Vostóka* (PPV) is a scientific series publishing different sources in Oriental languages. It was established in 1965 to supplement the series *Pámjatniki literatúry naródoV Vostóka*, which appeared from 1959 to 1966.

⁴⁹ Born in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1926.

⁵⁰ Rudenko 1962.

⁵¹ Musaéljan 1963.

⁵² See in Bidlīsī 1868–1875.

The Kurdish Studies group also included foreign doctoral candidates, of which Maruf Khaznadar, who became a well-known specialist of Kurdish literature, should be especially mentioned.

Much work has been done in the field of Kurdish folklore. Major contributions have come from Rudenko and Džalil. In the post-war period, however, Kurdish linguistics was not limited to the Kurdish Studies group of the Institute of Oriental Studies, USSR Academy of Sciences. As already mentioned, the Leningrad Institute of Linguistics, USSR Academy of Sciences, hosted both Smirnova and Ejjubi. Further scholars in this field included, amongst others, Avaliani who taught at Samarkand University and published numerous works on Kurmanji grammar. In 1957, Čerkes Chudoevič Bakaev published a Kurdish (Kurmanji)-Russian dictionary and studied the Kurdish dialects of the USSR.⁵³ In 1957, another Kurdish (Kurmanji)-Russian dictionary was published by Ivan Omarovič Farizov, a graduate of the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies.⁵⁴ Thus in this period of only three years, three large Kurdish-Russian dictionaries were published in the USSR. In the 1970s and 1980s, Ruslan Lazarevič Cabolov (1926–2003), a scholar at the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies, USSR (from 1992 Russian) Academy of Sciences, wrote extensively on Kurdish grammar but his work was severely criticized by other linguists within Russian Kurdology. In the 1950s, the academic discipline of Kurdish Studies increasingly started to actively develop other fields of studies besides the philological one, e.g. the 1950s and 1960s saw several PhD dissertations on the Kurdish liberation movement and ethnology. Noteworthy works include the following dissertations from Moscow: “On the Question of National Consolidation of the Kurds in Iran”⁵⁵ (1952) by Gurgen Bagratovič Akopov, “The Kurds of Iran”⁵⁶ (1953) by

⁵³ Bakaev 1965.

⁵⁴ Farizov 1957.

⁵⁵ Rus.: *K voprosu o nacional'noj konsolidacii kurdov v Irane*.

⁵⁶ Rus.: *Kurdy Irana*.

Tat'jana Fëdorovna Aristova, and "The Place of the National Liberation Movement of the Kurds in the Struggle of the Peoples of the Near and Middle East Against Imperialism"⁵⁷ (1953) by Farizov. Eminent dissertations by Iranian Kurds working in Baku include: Ali Kalaveš' (Salachov) "Agrarian Relations in Contemporary Iranian Kurdistan"⁵⁸ (1955) and Rachim Gazi's (Gaziev) "The Kurdistan Democratic Party – Organizer of the National Liberation Movement in Iranian Kurdistan (1945–1946)"⁵⁹ (1954).

After a long break due to his service in the Soviet Army, Vil'čevskij returned to the Leningrad Institute of Ethnography in 1954 and focused his research interests on the problem of the ethnography on the Kurds. It should be noted, however, that Vil'čevskij did not stop his studies of the Kurds during his military service.⁶⁰ In the course of the next few years, he published several works, with the largest monograph appearing in 1961⁶¹ and becoming his doctoral dissertation shortly before his death. Although the monograph has been assessed negatively by the Kurds themselves, it is considered one of the most extensive studies on the history of the formation of the Kurdish ethnic group.

2.2. Kurdish Studies in Moscow

The creation of a large Moscow-based center of Oriental Studies dealing with the entire spectrum of modern history and the politics of the East, along with the current Kurdish question in Iraq, inspired other scholars to become engaged in Kurdish Studies as well. In 1963,

⁵⁷ Rus.: *Mesto nacional'no-osvoboditel'nogo dviženija kurdiv v bor'be narodov Bližnego i Srednego Vostoka protiv imperIALIZMA.*

⁵⁸ Rus.: *Agrarnye otnošenija v sovremennom iranskom Kurdistane.*

⁵⁹ Rus.: *Kurdistsanskaja demokratičeskaja partija – organizator nacional'no-osvoboditel'nogo dviženija v Iranskom Kurdistane (1945–1946).*

⁶⁰ Vil'čevskij 1944, and other works.

⁶¹ Vil'čevskij 1961: 165.

Naftulla Aronovič Chalfin, a scientific researcher at the Institute of Oriental studies, published a monograph on the Kurdish issue in international relations in the 19th century,⁶² which in turn gave rise to the comprehensive study on the international aspect of the Kurdish question based on materials kept in Soviet archives.

In 1964, Michail Seměnovič Lazarev (1930–2010) published the monograph “Kurdistan and the Kurdish Problem”.⁶³ Aside from numerous articles and other works, it marked the first part of his famous and incomparable trilogy on the Kurdish issue in international relations from the end of the 19th century to the mid-20th century.⁶⁴

Starting in the early 1960s, numerous publications on the Kurdish liberation movement as well as the Kurdish question in different countries appeared regularly. Renowned Turkologist and Kurdologist Manvel Arsenovič Gasratjan (1924–2007) was another scholar at the Institute of Oriental Studies, USSR Academy of Sciences, to publish his works mainly dedicated to the Kurdish question in Turkey. In the 1960s–1980s, Gasratjan was one of only a few scholars working on that issue. He was the one who introduced a number of sources to the scientific world and studied the major policies of the Turkish authorities related to the Kurds, including the Kurdish uprisings in the 1920s and 1930s, the subsequent history of the Kurdish liberation movement, the programs of the Kurdish parties, and other aspects concerning the Kurds in Turkey.

⁶² Chalfin 1963.

⁶³ Lazarev 1964. In Russian: *Kurdistan i kurdskaja problema*. See also Lazarev 1972.

⁶⁴ Lazarev 1989; 2005.

At the Institute of Ethnography in Moscow, various issues of Kurdish culture and ethnic processes among the Kurds of Turkmenia and Transcaucasia were studied by Aristova.⁶⁵

Under the initiative of the dean of the Russian Academy, Evgenij Maksimovič Primakov (b. 1929), the group of Kurdologists at the Moscow Department of the Near and Middle East was established in 1979. Aside from its head Gasratjan, another member of the group was Ol'ga Ivanovna Žigalina.⁶⁶ Their work mostly concentrated on the analysis of contemporary Kurdish problems. In 1983, the group was transformed into the *Sector of Kurdish Studies and Regional Problems* under the leadership of Gasratjan who was later replaced by Lazarev in 1990. After Lazarev, Žigalina was appointed director of the Kurdish Sector in 2004. The Sector worked under her direction until she passed away on 23 October 2013. Structurally, *The Sector of Kurdish Studies and Regional Problems* was equivalent to other sectors of the department – on Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

2.3. Kurdish Studies in Yerevan

In the 1960s, Yerevan became another center of Soviet academic Kurdish Studies. From the 1940s on, the creation of the local Academy of Sciences was followed by the formation of Oriental studies departments, which were subsequently reorganized as institutions. In 1958, the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR established a department for Oriental studies separate from the Institute of History, Academy of Science of the Armenian SSR. In 1959, a new Kurdish Studies research group was formed and first headed by Hadžie Džindi (Kurdish: *Heciyê Cindî*, 1908–1990) before Chalit Muradovič Čatoev took over in 1961. In the early 1970s after

⁶⁵ Aristova 1966: 210, and other works. A number of articles about Aristova were published in Kurdish journals in the 1970s and 1980s.

⁶⁶ For more on Žigalina read Mosaki 2012: 206–210; Omarkhali 2014: 75–79.

the Institute of Oriental Studies was established based on that department, the Kurdology group was transformed into the Department of Kurdish Studies, headed by Šakro Chudoevič Mgoi (Kurdish: *Mihoyî*, 1930–2007) from 1981 to 1994.

In the 1960s, Mgoi published a series of articles in Armenian as well as a monograph on the Kurdish liberation movement in Iraq, which was based on his doctoral dissertation. In the 1970s, he began primarily publishing in Russian. In 1977, Mgoi released his monograph “The Problem of National Autonomy of the Kurdish People in the Republic of Iraq”⁶⁷, which was defended as his habilitation (*doktorskaja*) at the Institute of Oriental Studies, USSR Academy of Sciences.

Moreover, various aspects of the Kurds in the Ottoman Empire were studied by Džalile Džalil and published in monographs based on extensive archival material, such as “The Rise of the Kurds in 1880”⁶⁸ and “The Kurds of the Ottoman Empire in the First Half of the 19th Century”⁶⁹.

A number of interesting yet controversial works on the ethnic history of the Kurds were published by Akopov. Furthermore, Čatoev wrote monographs on the Kurds of the Soviet Armenia.

At the Institute of Oriental Studies, Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences, Maksim Usejnovič Chamojan (1934–2011) worked on Kurdish linguistics, namely on the Bahdinan dialect of Kurdish and the phraseology of the Kurdish language. He wrote his doctoral

⁶⁷ Rus.: *Problema nacional'noj avtonomii kurdsckogo naroda v Irackoj Respublike*.

⁶⁸ *Vosstanie kurdoev 1880*. This monograph was reviewed by Hubert Evans. “New Soviet Books in the Journal.” *Middle Eastern Studies* 3 (1), 1966, 68–73. It included two other book reviews, namely Chalfin “Bor’ba za Kurdistan” (1963) and Lazarev “Kurdistan i kurdsckaja problema” (1964).

⁶⁹ *Kurdy osmanskoj imperii v pervoj polovine XIX veka*.

dissertation at the Leningrad Institute of Oriental Studies, USSR Academy of Sciences. Since the 1960s, he has published a number of other works on the subject as well as a Kurdish-Russian phraseological dictionary and the monograph "Fundamentals of Kurdish Phraseology"⁷⁰.

Kurdish music became another subject of academic study in Armenia. The daughter of Hadžie Džindi, Nure, graduated from the Yerevan conservatory in 1966 and began working at the Institute of Arts, Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences. Since the 1960s, she has regularly published on the subject and defended her dissertation in 1971.⁷¹ Aside from publishing notes and translations of Kurdish folk songs, she authored a number of monographs and articles in Armenian dedicated to the music of the Kurds and Kurdish verbal art.

At the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences, Mamo Chalatovič Darvešjan worked on the issues of farming among the Kurds as well as other ethnographic issues.

In addition to Kelaveš and Gazi, Kurdish Studies in Baku were represented by the following Iraqi Kurd: Kemal' Mazhar Achmad, author of several papers and monographs on the liberation movement of the Iraqi Kurds,⁷² Gusejn Gasan ogly Alyšanov who studied the work of Abdullah Goran, Zumrud Talyš kyzy Ragimova (Šafieva, b. 1937) who analyzed the problem of genres in Kurdish poetry, and Kerim Amoev who worked on the economics of Iranian Kurdistan.

⁷⁰ *Osnovy frazeologii kurdsckogo jazyka*, see Chamojan 1979, 1988.

⁷¹ See, e.g. Džauari 1971.

⁷² Kamal' 1967. Reviewed by Hubert Evans in *Middle Eastern Studies* 2, 1968, 173–178.

In Tbilisi, the Kurdish issue primarily of the Iraqi Kurds was studied by Al'bert Michajlovič Mentešašvili – the researcher of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Georgian Academy of Science and Tbilisi University. A. Mamednazarov who started to write his doctoral dissertation at the Leningrad Institute of Oriental Studies and defended it at Moscow State University worked on the questions of ethnography of the Turkmenian Kurds.

In a nutshell, we can confirm that Soviet Kurdology reached its golden age in the early 1980s. Kurdish Studies were created in three major centers of Soviet Oriental studies - Leningrad, Moscow, and Yerevan - of the Academies of Sciences. Moreover, Kurdologists also worked outside of the Kurdish sectors in other parts of these institutions, e.g. at the Institute of Oriental Studies, the Institute of Ethnography, USSR Academy of Sciences (Moscow and Leningrad), the Institute of Linguistics, Academy of Sciences of the USSR (Moscow and Leningrad), the Institute of the Near and Middle East, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, and at other institutes of the Academy of Sciences of Armenia and Turkmenistan.

Within one decade prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, a large number of serious works were published in Kurdish Studies. Dozens of monographs appeared without counting articles and collections of articles. In this context, the following works, amongst other, deserve to take center stage: the Kurdish (Sorani)-Russian dictionary by Kurdoev and Jusupova⁷³, works on Kurdish philology by Bakaev⁷⁴, research by Smirnova⁷⁵, Chamojan⁷⁶, Cukerman⁷⁷, and Jusupova⁷⁸,

⁷³ Kurdoev, Jusupova 1983.

⁷⁴ Bakaev 1983.

⁷⁵ Smirnova 1985.

⁷⁶ Chamojan 1988. This monograph was defended as a habilitation (*dóktorskaja*) at the Institute of Linguistics, USSR Academy of Science (examiners Ju. Rubinčik, Č. Bakaev, and I. Cukerman).

⁷⁷ Cukerman 1986.

publications of Kurdish manuscripts⁷⁹, on Kurdish folklore by Ordichan and Džalile Džalil⁸⁰, monographs on Kurdish ethnography by Rudenko⁸¹, Aristova⁸² and Darvešjan⁸³ and on the history of the Kurdish emirates Ardalan and Baban by Vasil'eva⁸⁴. Moreover, the list includes studies on the history of the Kurds in the Middle Ages based on earlier Arabic sources,⁸⁵ on the Kurdish issue in international relations in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire by Lazarev⁸⁶, on the Kurdish issue in Turkey by Gasratjan⁸⁷, on the Kurds of Iran by Žigalina⁸⁸, on the Kurdish issue in Iraq⁸⁹, the collective monograph by Gasratjan, Dž. Džalil, Žigalina, Lazarev and Mgoi on the history of the Kurdish movement in the 19th and 20th century⁹⁰ and other publications⁹¹.

It was, however, a period of increasingly worrying signs as recognized by Kurdoev. During the All-Union Conference of Kurdologists at Leningrad in 1982, Kurdoev drew attention to a number of serious problems that Kurdish Studies saw itself confronted with. According to him, despite the dozens of doctoral dissertations defended in the field of Kurdish Studies, the number of specialists in the scientific

⁷⁸ Jusupova 1985.

⁷⁹ *Istorija kurdsckogo knjažeskogo doma Bani Ardalan* 1984; Bajazidi 1986. *Kurdsckie narodnye pesni iz rukopisnogo sobranija GPB im. M.E. Saltykova-Ščedrina* 1985.

⁸⁰ Džalilov 1982; *Kurdsckie skazki, legendy i predanija* 1989; *Kurdsckie narodnye poslovitsy i pogovorki* 1991.

⁸¹ Rudenko 1982.

⁸² Aristova 1990.

⁸³ Darvešjan 1986.

⁸⁴ Vasil'eva 1991.

⁸⁵ Poladjan 1987.

⁸⁶ Lazarev 1989.

⁸⁷ Gasratjan 1990.

⁸⁸ Žigalina 1988.

⁸⁹ Mgoi 1991.

⁹⁰ Gasratjan 1987.

⁹¹ Mentešašvili 1984.

institutions had not increased because the majority of PhD candidates were Kurds from abroad. Kurdoev emphasized that he had alerted the head of the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Academy of Sciences of the need to train Kurdologists within the framework of the USSR's academic institutions. It was his opinion that if radical measures were not taken to establish and promote the Kurdologist staff, Kurdish Studies would die out as an independent branch of Oriental studies ten to fifteen years later (i.e. 1992–1997).⁹²

3. Post-Soviet period

In 1998 at St. Petersburg State University, university entrants were offered a Kurdish Studies specialization due to the initiative of O. Džalilov, and support from the dean of Oriental Studies and of Department of Iranian Studies, St. Petersburg State University, Ivan Michajlovič Steblin-Kamenskij (b. 1945). After three students (including Omarkhali) had been accepted in 1998, it has never been offered again. This group of students completed the whole program of Iranian Studies with additional specialization in Kurdish Studies. The courses were also conducted by O. Džalilov and Jusupova.

In 2007, the St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Manuscripts was reorganized and the independent group of Kurdish Studies was integrated into the Section of Near Eastern Studies (*Séktor Blížneho Vostóka*), led by the professor in Iranian Studies Alij Ivanovič Kolesnikov (b. 1935) who replaced Oleg Fëdorovič Akimuškin (1929–2010) in 2010 .

The decline of funding for and prestige of the Academy - which affected Kurdology as well – was a consequence of the collapse of the Soviet Union, a severe economic crisis, and the changing role of

⁹² Mosaki 2011: 177.

science in the newly formed Russia. Nevertheless, Kurdologists with impressive scientific experience continued to work up to the end of the Soviet Union. Major work was accomplished in the field of Kurdish dialectology (Jusupova, Smirnova and Ejjubi). Jusupova described Hawromani and Gorani dialects based on literary works.⁹³ Smirnova and Ejjubi published monographs on the Zaza and Synei dialects as well as the historical dialectological grammar of Kurdish.⁹⁴ In addition, Vasil'eva, Musaéljan and O. Džalil published their works on the history of the Kurds and folklore.⁹⁵

In 1996, Musaéljan published the famous two-volume bibliography on Kurdish Studies from the 16th century up to 1985 (*Bibliografija po kurdovedeniju*) in St. Petersburg.⁹⁶

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, St. Petersburg Kurdish Studies continued their fruitful work. By the end of the first decade and following the deaths of Ejjubi, Smirnova, O. Džalil as well as

⁹³ Jusupova 1998; 2000; 2007. The majority of Russian scholars (Kurdoev, Jusupova, Smirnova, and others) share the opinion that Zazaki (Dimili) and Gorani are Kurdish dialects in contrast to their European colleagues (McCenzie, Ludwig Paul, Geoffrey Haig, and others) who consider them to be non-Kurdish languages. As the member of the St. Petersburg Kurdish Cabinet Jusupova explains, "The description of Gorani and Awramani was made on the basis of literary texts that turned out to be a new method in the Kurdish linguistics. The studies of these dialects were very important for Kurdish dialectology since some Iranian scholars (such as D. McCenzie and J. Blau) and Kurdologists (R. Cabolov) argue, without any solid reasons, that they have no relationship to Kurdish, as with the Northern Kurdish dialect Zaza, examined by K.K. Kurdoev and I.A. Smirnova (in cooperation with K.R. Ejjubi). The works of the above mentioned scholars showed the invalidity of such a point of view." Jusupova, Z.A., *Kurdish Studies at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts (1959–2005)*. See in: http://kurdica.orientalstudies.ru/eng/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=196&Itemid=86. Translated by A. Zorin; proofread by S. Wickham-Smith. Last Updated 06.11.2008. Viewed on 01 July 2010.

⁹⁴ Smirnova / Ejjubi 1998, 1999, 2001.

⁹⁵ See e.g. Musaéljan 1983.

⁹⁶ Musaéljan 1996.

Musaëljan's retirement in 2013, however, St. Petersburg Kurdish Studies had been seriously thinned out. Today in 2014, there are just two specialists in Kurdish Studies, Vasil'eva and Jusupova, working in the cabinet. Vasil'eva currently has one PhD candidate who is conducting research on the history of the Marwanid dynasty. There are no other new members in the cabinet, though. Despite their age, health problems, and the absence (or avoidance) of computers, two members of the cabinet (also Musaëljan until 2013) are still active and enliven the discipline with their new publications. Among the most recent publications, the works of Vasil'eva⁹⁷, Musaëljan⁹⁸ and Jusupova bear special mention.⁹⁹

In the field of Kurdish Studies at the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies, research has been traditionally conducted in contemporary history and political problems. In the mid-1990s, a group of Kurdish intellectuals opened a Kurdish center led by Mgoi in Moscow. In fact, he was the center's only employee. With the support of the Kurds, the center published a number of books and collections of articles, including "The History of Kurdistan" (*Istorija Kurdistana*),¹⁰⁰ after which the center ceased to exist.

From 2001–2010, Cabolov authored a Kurdish etymological dictionary.¹⁰¹ In the 1990s, well-known Kurdologists who worked in other academic institutions in Moscow – Bakaev and Aristova – passed away.

Žigalina published a number of valuable monographs based on extensive archival materials on the Kurdish khanates of Khorasan in

⁹⁷ Vasil'eva 2010: 207–230.

⁹⁸ Musaëljan 2011: 94–110.

⁹⁹ Jusupova 2010: 105–126; 2011: 309–310.

¹⁰⁰ Lazarev et. al 1999.

¹⁰¹ Cabolov 2001, 2010.

the late 19th and early 20th century,¹⁰² and on the Kurds of Kermanshah.¹⁰³ Lazarev completed his third book on the Kurdish issue in international relations after the Treaty of Lausanne and the end of World War II.¹⁰⁴ Former doctoral candidates of Lazarev, Nodar Zejnalovič Mosaki (b. 1975) and Kirill Valentinovič Vertjaev (b. 1973), published monographs on various issues of the modern Kurdish question.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the Kurdish sector of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Science regularly publishes collections of articles. However, taking into account the death of Gasratjan (2007), Mgoi (2006), Lazarev (2010) and Žigalina (2013), the sector of Kurdish Studies has ceased to play a vital scientific role at the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies.

Conclusion

Russian Kurdish Studies originated in tsarist Russia and experienced a profound level of development in the Soviet period. In the Soviet Union, Kurdology developed across a wide spectrum. Religious studies, however, remained somewhat separate. After the publication of a few works by the Soviet Kurdologists mainly in the 1930s, hardly any work was conducted in this field. The fundamental character of Soviet Kurdish Studies was determined by the old tradition of Oriental Studies, especially Iranian Studies in St. Petersburg, of translation and critical editions of manuscripts, huge archives in Oriental languages on the history of the Kurds and the Kurdish language.

In Moscow, other areas of Kurdish Studies showed major development, stimulated by an increase in the role of the Kurdish

¹⁰² Žigalina 2002.

¹⁰³ Žigalina 2008.

¹⁰⁴ Lazarev 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Mosaki 2005; 2011; Vertjaev 2007.

factor in the Near and Middle East after World War II, and the intensification of USSR policies in the region. The presence of significant archival materials from the times of the Russian Empire afforded Soviet historians the possibility to better understand and explore many questions of the history of the Kurds of the early 19th and 20th century.

At the same time, however, Kurdish Studies was not able to become a full-fledged branch of Oriental Studies. Unlike other fields of study, e.g. Turkish Studies, Arabic Studies, Iranian Studies, the higher education system did not fully prepare Kurdologists. The cataclysmic events of the 1980s–1990s led to a strong decline in the prestige of scientific disciplines and affected Kurdish Studies, perceived as a “direction without perspective” in particular. In Leningrad/St. Petersburg, there has not been any new young Kurdologists since the foundation of the group of Kurdish Studies in 1959.¹⁰⁶ In the course of the last 55 years, the group of scholars never changed. A similar situation can be observed in Moscow. Although today’s Kurdish Studies is still an active academic platform in Russia, the field is confronted with a big problem, namely the lack of trained scientific personnel. Moreover, there is virtually no close cooperation between Russian institutions/scholars with European and Kurdish ones. The Soviet Kurdish Studies’ lack of serious involvement in world scholarship certainly was a significant disadvantage. Research was exclusively published in Russian (and in Armenian, Azeri and Georgian in the Transcaucasian republics), thus preventing wider acquaintance in Western scholarship.

¹⁰⁶ The St. Petersburg school of Kurdish Studies should also include the specialist in religious studies Khanna Omarkhali (b. 1981) who conducts her research at the Georg-August University, Gottingen. See e.g. Omarkhali 2005.

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